Northumbrian dialect

The **Northumbrian dialect** refers to any of several English language varieties spoken in the historic English region of Northumbria, the northernmost section of present-day North East England. This may include such varieties as:

- Northumbrian Old English, an Old English dialect from which Modern Scots is descended
- Geordie, perhaps the most famous dialect of English spoken in the region, largely spoken in Tyneside, centered on Newcastle[1][2]
- Mackem, a dialect of English spoken in Wearside, centred on Sunderland
- Pitmatic, an older slang or lexicon used in mining towns in Northumberland and Durham (still spoken in Ashington)
- Northumbrian dialect, a disappearing English dialect or Anglic language variety spoken in the counties of Northumberland and Durham,[1] linguistically closest to Lowland Scots.[3]

This article focuses only on the final variety, most commonly known in academic literature as **Northumbrian English** or Northumbrian dialect.

Northumbrian (British) English	
Native to	England
Region	Northumberland and County Durham
Language family	Indo-European ▪ Germanic ▪ West Germanic ▪ Ingvaeonic ▪ Anglo-Frisian ▪ Anglic ▪ English ▪ British English ▪ **Northumbrian (British) English**
Early forms	Old English (Northumbrian) ▪ Middle English ▪ Early Modern English
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	–
Glottolog	*None*

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Phonology

Consonants

- In Northumberland and northern County Durham /ɪ/ is traditionally pronounced [ʁ] or perhaps even [ʀ], a feature known as the Northumbrian burr. Once a widespread feature, the burr was associated with Newcastle and Durham City in the 18th century. [4] This sound is now largely confined to older residents in rural areas in Northumberland.
- In contrast to most Northern English varieties, traditional dialects spoken north of the Tees are largely H-retaining. However, H-dropping is now reported on Wearside (see the article about Mackem).[5]
- As with most dialects of English, final [ŋ] sound is reduced to [n] e.g. *waakin* for "walking".

Location of the historic counties of Northumberland and Durham within England

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Nasal	m		n			ŋ		
Stop	p b		t d	t͡ʃ d͡ʒ		k g		
Fricative	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ		x	ʁ	h
Approximant			r		j	ʍ w		
Lateral			l					

Vowels

- The vowel [ɜː] typically becomes [ɔː] ,and so *work* would rhyme with *fork* in Northumbrian. For instance, *certainly* becomes *sortainly* [sɔːtn̩li] and *surge* becomes *sorge* [sɔːd͡ʒ] etc.
- The letter "i" in words like *find*, *blind* or *pint* is pronounced as [ɪ], as opposed to [aɪ], and so "*find"* would rhyme with *wind* (noun) or *stint.*
- Occurring throughout much of north & west Northumberland, the vowel "oʊ" in words like "phone" and "tone" moves closer to a "ɜ" sound, so "phone" would be pronounced the same as the word "fern". Amongst those with stronger accents, the same process can happen to the "ɒ" sound, so "cod" would be pronounced as "curd".
- The vowel sound [ɔː] as in *call* corresponds to [aː] (represented by aa). And so *call*, *walk* and *talk* are *caal*, *waak* and *taak* in Northumbrian.
  - This creates some minimal pairs based upon phonemic vowel length, such as *te tak* /tak/ ("to take" in some dialects, such as those of Wearside) vs. te taak /taːk/
- The diphthong [aʊ̯] in words such as down and town corresponds to the long vowel [uː] (written as "oo"), therefore *down* and *town* are "doon" and "toon" in Northumbrian. However, it is shortened to [ʊ] when followed by [nd], so "pound" and "found" are "pund" and "fund".
- The diphthong [eɪ] often corresponds to [jɛ] in dialectal Northumbrian speech, such as *te tyek* (to take) and *fyess* (face), but may also correspond to [(j)a] in some Northumbrian dialects such as *te tak* or *fyass*.

- Long vowel [uː] in words such as *book* and *cook* typically corresponds to other sounds, such as [jʉː] or [ʉ.ə], as in the word *skeul* (school).
- Lack of foot-strut split, as in other Northern English varieties.
- Words with the Received Pronunciation diphthong [əʊ] usually corresponds to [jɛ] in some words in traditional Northumbrian dialect, such as *byeth* and *hyem* for "both" and "home". However, older forms such as *baith* and *hame*, which are shared with Scots, survive in some Northumbrian dialects.[6]

Monophthongs of Northumbrian (Tyneside)

	Front			Central	Back	
	unrounded		rounded			
	short	long			short	long
Close	ɪ	iː			ʊ	uː
Close-mid		eː	øː	ə		oː
Open-mid	ɛ	ɛː				ɔː
Open	a	aː			ɒ	ɒː

Diphthongs

Diphthongs of Northumbrian (Tyneside)

		Endpoint		
		Front	Central	Back
Start point	**Front**	ai	iɐ	æu
	Back	oe	uɐ	

Berwick-upon-Tweed

Berwick-upon-Tweed is unique within Northumberland. The local speech has characteristics of the rural Northumberland dialect and due to its geographical location, has characteristics of the East Central Scots dialect as well.[7]

This Dialect has several distinguishing features from the Geordie dialect and features of this dialect include the "Northumbrian burr", a distinct pronunciation of the letter R and elongation of vowels although this feature is not just specific to Berwick-upon-Tweed.

A sociological study of the Anglo-Scottish border region conducted in the year 2000 found that locals of Alnwick, 30 miles (48 km) south of Berwick, associated the Berwick accent with Scottish influence. Conversely, those from Eyemouth, Scotland, 9 miles (14 km) north of Berwick, firmly classed Berwick speech as English, identifying it as Northumbrian.

Classification in relation to English and Scots

The Northumbrian Language Society, founded in 1983 to research, preserve and promote the Northumbrian language variety, considers it as divergent enough to be not a dialect of Modern Standard English but, rather, a separate English (Anglic) language of its own, since it is largely not comprehensible by standard English speakers.[1] Northumbrian has perhaps an even closer relationship with the Scots language,[8] and both are sometimes considered as distinct languages derived from Old English but close relatives,[1] or as essentially the same language, albeit with minor differences; however, this similarity is not commonly or formally recognised due to sensitivities on both side of the border.[9] The status of Scots and Northumbrian as either languages or dialects therefore continues to be open to debate.[10]

Grammar

- Northumbrian includes some strong plurals such as *ee*/*een* (eye/eyes), *coo*/*kye* (cow/cows) and *shough*/*shoon* (shoe/shoes) that survived from Old English into Northumbrian but have become weak plurals in Standard Modern English – ox/oxen and child/children being exceptions. Regular Northumbrian plurals which correspond to irregular in Standard English include *laifs* (loaves), *wifes* (wives) and *shelfs* (shelves)[11]
- Use of the singular second-person pronouns *thoo* or *tha* and *thee*. This is a T form in the T–V distinction.
- In Northumbrian the definite article is unreduced as in Standard English and Scots. Notable exceptions include Weardale and Teesdale, where the definite article is reduced to *t'* as in Yorkshire and Cumbrian.[12]

Vocabulary

Some Northumbrian words include:[13][14]

- aa / aw - I
- aboot - about
- aalreet (/'a:lɪi:t/) - a variation on "alright" or "hello" (often used in the phrase "aalreet mate"). The "l" sound is also often dropped, meaning it is pronounced as "aa'reet"
- aye - yes
- bairn/grandbairn - child/grandchild
- bari - "good" or "lovely"
- banter - chat/gossip
- belta - "really good", used in the film Purely Belter
- bess - "please ya bess" for "please yourself"
- te boule - to roll, however *te boule aboot* means to "mess around"
- bray - to overpower or defeat someone, usually in a physical sense
- cannit or canna - cannot
- canny - "pleasant", or like in Scots "quite" (therefore something could be described as "canny canny")
- chud - chewing gum
- clart or clarts - "mud" as in "thar's clarts on yor beuts"
- cuddy - a small horse or a pony
- te dee - do
- deeks - "look" as in "Gi'z a deeks" - "Gimme a look"
- divvent, dinnit or dinna - "don't"
- divvie - an insult, referring to a stupid person

- doon - down,
- ee - oh, an exclamation of shock
- fitha, faatha or fadder - "father"
- te gaan or gaannin - to go
- gadgie - man
- git awesh - "go away"
- geet, varry - very
- gi'z- "Give me", compare "Gimme"
- haad - "hold" example: *keep a haad* means "keep a hold" or "luck after", and *haad yor gob* means "keep quiet".]
- hev or hae - have
- hacky - "dirty"
- haddaway - "get away"[25]
- hairn (or hen) - similar to "hinny", see below
- hinny a term of endearment - "Honey"[24]
- hoose - house
- ho'wair, ho'way or ha'way - "come on"
- te hoy - to throw [24]
- hyem - "home"
- uz- me, for example *Pass uz the gully* meaning "Pass me the knife"
- ket - sweets
- te knaa - know
- lekky - electricity, or electric
- te lend - often used for borrow, (*lend uz a bi* meaning "Can I borrow a pen?")
- like - used in many sentences; usually every other word, e.g. *like, is he on aboot me or like, summat, like?*
- ma for "my
- mair for "more" (compare with German "mehr")
- mam/maa a variation of Mother
- man - often used as a generic term of address, as in "Giv uz it heor noo man" or "haway man"
- marra - Friend. Used like "mate" - *aalreet marra* meaning "hello friend")
- me - my (compare: myself > *meself* or *mesel*)
- mollycoddle - overprotect, "wrap in cotton wool"
- muckle - similar to "canny", in the sense of meaning "quite". It can also mean "big", for instance "Yon hoose hez a muckle windae" means "that house has a big window"
- ner, na or nar - no
- neb - nose (nebby = nosey)
- neet - night
- nettie - toilet
- nivvor - never
- noo - now,
- nowt - nothing [24]
- owt - anything
- pet - a term of address or endearment towards a woman or a child
- plodge - to stomp about or wade through something ungracefully
- radge or radgie - crazy

- sel - "self" as in mesel = myself, yersel = yourself, hesel = himself, horsel = herself, waselves, thaselves
- shuttin for "shooting" thus simply shortening the "oo" vowel sound
- snek - nose
- spelk - a splinter
- stot - to bounce. A well-known local bread bun called a 'stottie cake' receives its name from the fact the dough is 'stotted' about when being made.
- summat or summick - something
- tab - cigarette
- tiv or te - to. The former is usually used when the following word begins with a vowel. *Thar's nowt tiv it* - "there's nothing to it"
- thae - they as in "What are thae deein?" meaning "What are they doing?"
- toon - town (or specifically Newcastle)
- wa - "our". used in a more general sense unlike "wor" below as in "Divvint touch wa bags" means "Don't touch our bags"
- willent, winnit - "won't"
- wor - our, Used primarily to denote a family member, such as "wor bairn"
- wu- "us" as in *What ye deein te wu?* means "What are you doing to us?"
- yark - verb meaning to hit or move abrasively. Believed to be a corruption of "jerk"
- ye or 'ee for you as in *What are 'ee deein* meaning "What are you doing?"
- yor, thee - your

See also

- Northumbrians (modern)

References

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Further reading

- Bill Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, 2005

External links

- Northumbrian dictionary (https://glosbe.com/en/mis_nor)
- Northumbrian Language Society (http://www.northumbriana.org.uk/langsoc/)

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